United Nations E/2008/NGO/22

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
1 July 2008

Original: English

Substantive session of 2008
New York, 30 June-25 July 2008
Agenda item 2 (c)
Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to sustainable development

Statement submitted by International Movement ATD Fourth World, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

08-40774 (E) 110708

Statement

The international community continues to reaffirm its commitment to sustainable development, yet for hundreds of millions of people in extreme poverty, the benefits of sustainable development remain elusive. By reaching out and harnessing the daily efforts of people in the Antohomadinika and Ikopa districts and people recycling on refuse dumps in Antananarivo, Madagascar, the **International Movement ATD Fourth World**[1] is creating a dynamic with Madagascan society which respects the core values of sustainable development — development that respects the environment while promoting sustainable "human" development, decent work and dignity. In this complex equation, an improvement in the lives and opportunities for the most excluded people is a key indicator of development that is environmentally, socially and ethically sustainable.

Vocational and educational development projects have difficulties in reaching people living in extreme poverty who endure multiple difficulties (severe financial constraints, education, employment, health, housing, etc). These barriers have a mutually reinforcing impact and their duration over time severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities by themselves in the foreseeable future.[2] Approaches that may be effective in helping people in poverty often do not work for the poorest and most excluded. A relationship of mutual trust and understanding must be developed between people in extreme poverty and the institutions and individuals trying to support them.

Conditions are trying for the informal sector workers in Antohomadinika district who undertake a wide range of activities such as selling, recuperation and transporting. Conditions are also very difficult for refuse workers in Antananarivo refuse dumps. Due to a lack of possibilities elsewhere, stigma and the fear of losing the small earnings that the refuse dump ensures, the barriers to accessing other opportunities are high for the refuse workers. The people with whom ATD Fourth World interacts are therefore diverse, each one willing to contribute their skills and knowledge to creating a project to strengthen and harness existing efforts made. The idea to start putting some conditions in place to facilitate this came to light.

Miasa Mianatra Miaraka

In 2005 some informal sector workers mainly from the Antohomadinika district started to share their skills in crocheting, embroidery and hair cutting. Raw materials were donated and in 2006 a workspace was rented and the possibility of a cooperative looked into. ***Miasa Mianatra Miaraka*** (Working and Learning Together) is a pilot project based on two key objectives. The first is to enable people living in very disadvantaged areas to access technology, vocational training and to create decent work using their traditional skills and know-how. The second is a research component, with support of the World Bank, to learn with the participants what is needed to achieve the goals of decent work and sustainable development. Key to this project is assuring that the poorest and most excluded people are supported to participate in the project and contribute to its development and ongoing evaluation. Key partners are Alcatel-Lucent, a major international telecommunication firm; Data Telecom Service (DTS), Madagascar's leading Internet service provider; as well as national civil society organisations (such as Enda-Indien Oceans "Espace Jeunes" community centre, NRJ-Nouveau Relais des

[1] International NGO in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council that has no religious or political affiliation and engages with individuals and institutions in over 30 countries, "north" and "south", to find solutions to tackle extreme poverty in partnership with people in poverty themselves.

[2] Based on the definition first defined in "Chronic Poverty and Lack of Basic Security", Wresinski report to the Economic and Social Council of France, February 1987.

Jeunes etc). The project also works in partnership with the local and national administration as a key component of national ownership.

Craft cooperative

A craft cooperative was established with adults producing products for the home market (peanut oil, wooden furniture, woven burial shrouds, etc.). Some 22 craftsmen and women are currently employed in the cooperative. One of the women working in the cooperative said that she would get herself out of extreme poverty, that she was different now, and that her life had changed. Another worker recounted his pride in leaving home in the morning and going to the cooperative, saying that he was seen differently.

Computer discovery and training

A sixteen-year-old participant in the computer project said that she used to think she would spend her life at the refuse dump, but that's not what she wanted to do. So she was working hard to learn.

Alcatel and Data Telecom Service (DTS) provided an antenna and Internet access for two years to support the establishment of a computer workshop, which is closely linked to the cooperative. Around one hundred young people will be trained over 2-3 years, and will take on the task of sharing their knowledge with other young people. Young adults who are new to literacy are helping the trainers to design a CD-rom to teach literacy in the Malagasy language. The first training cycle began in November 2006 with 16 youths. A specific research focus is on the conditions needed to enable young people to have successful literacy and computer training, and to eventually find job opportunities in the field of new technologies. The person responsible for the workshop works closely with each young person in the project, and takes into account the reality of his or her everyday lives. In order to support some of the youths who sort refuse at night, a small stipend was offered to them to enable their continued participation.

Continual learning and evolution in the cooperative

The establishment of this project is the first step on a long journey, and the daily functioning of the cooperative regularly poses new challenges. Difficulties arise such as absenteeism (between 7-11 percent due to adverse weather conditions, health etc), the different productivity levels of the workers, the quality of the finished products, and the general establishment of working relations. It is important to maintain an open dialogue around the questions of fairness and equality of pay that arise as some participants learn to work better and more quickly than others. Respect and acceptance of those who progress more slowly contributes to creating a more positive and productive atmosphere for everyone. Tackling these challenges requires a permanent dialogue between workers, support staff and other partners to develop a "social contract" for the cooperative, which all members can sign up to and be part of.

Some conclusions and challenges ahead

- It is essential from the outset to have the clear ambition of reaching and being open to the poorest and most excluded people to ensure their continual participation. This is a key ingredient of best practice based on truly inclusive and supportive decent work opportunities.
- Education and training are not sufficient to help the most excluded people to earn a decent wage. A wider, supportive environment is necessary. Development projects and policies should mix social, environmental and economics goals to tackle extreme poverty on the long term and in partnership with the local population, authorities and private sector partners.

- Informal sector workers are productive and demonstrate ingenuity as true contributors to sustainable development. The cooperative is a way to unite their strengths and gain greater credibility, yet the dynamism and efforts of those outside of the cooperative who continue in the informal sector should continue to be valued and supported. Efforts should be encouraged to value the economic and social contributions of those in the informal sector, and to include them fairly and appropriately in social policy initiatives and projects.